

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20510

December 16, 2021

Mr. Randy Moore
Chief, U.S. Forest Service
U.S. Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Ave, SW
Washington, D.C. 20250

Mr. Terry Cosby
Chief, Natural Resources Conservation Service
U.S. Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Avenue, SW
Washington, DC 20250

Dear Chiefs Moore and Cosby,

We write today to urge you to address issues with the Emergency Watershed Protection (EWP) program that are impeding local efforts to recover from wildfire and prevent further destruction. We urge you to clarify explicitly that EWP funds can in fact be used on National Forest System (NFS) lands, and facilitate cooperation between your agencies to quickly approve EWP projects on NFS lands. This request is in line with a recent Government Accountability Office report on the EWP program, recommending additional clarification for the use of these funds on federal lands.

EWP is the first and best source of funding for wildfire recovery of our nation's watersheds. With larger and more intense wildfires due to a warming climate, EWP will only become more vital to safeguard lives and protect water quality. It is unavoidable that wildfires will burn across areas with a patchwork of land ownership, including on NFS lands, and it is essential that this work can be completed on all of those lands without unnecessary limitations.


United States Department of Agriculture policy clearly states that EWP may be used on NFS lands. However, we have observed significant difficulties doing so in the aftermath of recent fires in Colorado and across the Western United States. We appreciate that the U.S. Forest Service recently approved a "pilot" project using EWP funds to restore affected federal lands in the Cameron Peak burn scar in Colorado, however that project remains unfunded, and further clarification for the EWP program is needed to prevent future unnecessary administrative delays.

Further delays to the restoration of these watersheds threaten additional lives and property, increase costs in the long run, and negatively impact drinking water quality in the watershed. It is imperative that communities recovering from disasters do not encounter unnecessary bureaucratic hurdles in their efforts to receive and apply EWP assistance in recovery.


We ask that you work to ensure communities can smoothly and quickly access EWP assistance after disasters—regardless of whether those disasters happen on private, state, tribal, or NFS lands—and clarify that these funds can be used on NFS lands.

Thank you for your consideration of this request, and we look forward to continuing to work with you.


Sincerely,




Joe Neguse
Member of Congress




Michael F. Bennet
United States Senator



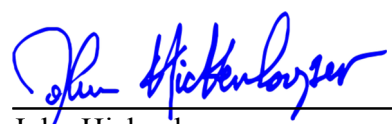
Kathy Castor
Member of Congress




Jason Crow
Member of Congress



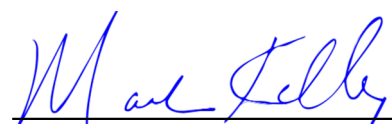
Diana DeGette
Member of Congress



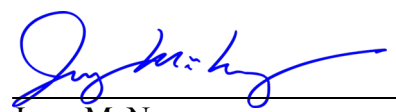
John Hickenlooper
United States Senator



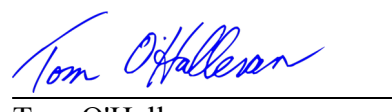
Jared Huffman
Member of Congress



Mark Kelly
United States Senator



Jerry McNerney
Member of Congress



Tom O'Halleran
Member of Congress



Jimmy Panetta
Member of Congress



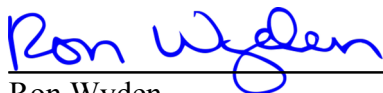
Ed Perlmutter
Member of Congress



Kyrsten Sinema
United States Senator



Melanie Stansbury
Member of Congress



Ron Wyden
United States Senator